

# HOME OF THE MONTH

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Hang onto your stovepipe hat, Abe Lincoln because you're about to see a timber frame and log home that you won't believe. Dan Cooney's "barn" on five-and-a-half acres of hilltop property in Chester Springs has rustic elegance and modern comfort far removed from the leaky shacks of yesteryear, yet it also has a traditional feel that's pure Americana.

The Cooney Barn—complete with silo in homage to the region's rich agricultural legacy—is a hybrid of three distinct styles. The main living space is timber frame construction, the master bedroom wing is a straightforward log structure, and the attached three-car garage and loft is a more conventional "stick-built" section. Each has its own character, and together they make a unique living space for Dan Cooney, who built this house as a combination residence and sales model for the TimberDreams division of Hearthstone, Inc., the company he represents. Currently 4,600 square feet of living space is finished, but up to 2,500 more square feet of unfinished space could be converted for additional use.

The first thing Cooney likes to explain is the different appearance of the three sections. "When people hear 'log' they immediately attach 'cabin'," he says, debunking a popular misconception, "but a timber frame home needn't be limited to an old-fashioned look. There's no reason you couldn't go with a contemporary style. You can't tell from the outside that a house is a timber frame house; the outside can be stucco, brick, stone, or wood.

"The log-and-chink part of the Barn is done in historically accurate Appalachian style square logs, dovetail joinery, and about two inches of chinking space," Cooney adds. "The exterior garage and the space about it is faced with fiber cement composite siding that looks like wood but is impervious to weather and bugs."

Traditional timber framing uses massive posts and beams interlocked by mortise and tenon joinery in which sturdy wooden tabs (tenons) fit snugly into matching slots (mortise). Oak pegs secure the frame members; no nails are used. The completed frame is planed, sanded, and oiled, then left exposed. In this case, the main post and beam, called the king post truss, serves as the dominant architectural feature. The skeletal frame is itself the structural component, unlike conventional construction where the walls bear the load. This makes the design extremely flexible when it comes to decisions about open or enclosed space.

"One thing a timber frame home allows you to do is to create designed volume," Cooney says, presenting the three-story great room framed with Eastern white pine. "You can keep things open and create your own unique living environment."

Indeed, the main living area is breathtakingly spacious. The sheer height of the great room carries the eye upward, past cleverly displayed items like blankets on the rungs of a ladder, folk art, and an antique chessboard. At the center of the first floor is a huge stone chimney hearth designed for double duty: the side facing the great room accommodates a wood-burning fireplace, while at a ninety-degree angle to that a gas

fireplace warms the island of the thoroughly modern, open kitchen. Well-placed windows fill the space with light.

Cooney wanted to soften the square edges of the great room, and at the same time he wanted to amplify the home's barnlike look. The result: a ten-foot diameter 40-foot high silo area that begins on the first floor and soars above the roof. Here on the first floor, the tongue-in-groove paneled area houses a dry bar, a nice adjunct for an area that's tailor-made for entertaining.

Another enhancement to the floor plan is the sunroom on the west side, separated from the great room and silo by a stone divider that matches the hearth. It has a private intimate feel, a cozy enclave within all that space. To change the look and feel from one area to the other, Cooney varied the stain and color scheme. While the great room is primarily honey and brown, the sun room is weathered grey, with a radiant-heated ceramic tile floor. Hand-hewn sandblasted beams continue this natural, white washed look.

The opposite side of the great room opens onto a small covered porch with a commanding view of open space. The balcony is made of Trex decking rather than wood, in keeping with Cooney's openness to using superior, maintenance-free materials as long as they have an old-fashioned look.

As one would expect from a civil engineer who's spent twenty-two years in the telecommunication industry, Cooney's barn is fully wired. "I wanted a networked home, so the barn is wired for audio, video, telecommunications, cable, internet, and intercom," he says.

Outdoors, facing the house, one gets a good look at the charcoal grey logs and white chinked exterior of the 24-by-28 foot log section that houses the master bedroom suite. "The hand-hewn logs are squared off, twelve inches high and six inches thick," explains Cooney. The chinking space and pre-drilled chases allow you to run any kind of wiring, and a throughbolt system allows uniform shrinking and settling. To protect against termites, the wood is treated and sealed. The foundation is also treated, just like it could be with any type home.

Inside the log portion, one notices again the flexibility of the design and floor plan. Interior walls are not load-bearing, allowing the closet and bath to be positioned and sized to suit one's fancy. A gas fireplace is a romantic yet practical addition. Cooney expanded the standard bathroom with an extra 20-foot by 10-foot bumpout of structural insulated panels (SIPs), creating the perfect place for a Jacuzzi tub surrounded by earth-toned ceramic tile. Beyond this space is a private Trex back deck with a hot tub and another lovely view of open fields.

Back in the timber frame portion, Cooney shows his office, fronted with glass French doors under an archway, the laundry/mud room, and the powder room. Then it's up the Douglas fir staircase to the second floor where the silo makes a wonderful reading nook and overlook into the great room. There are also two additional bedrooms. One has a private balcony overlooking the great room; the other has a private bath. Steps lead to the attic loft, which is finished and would make an excellent study or hobby area. The second floor hall bath uses the same color scheme as the other bathrooms, but with smaller tiles to complement its size.

Dan Cooney is not a trained decorator, yet he has a flair for interior design that many professionals would envy. (He modestly claims to have inherited his ability from

his mother.) Little touches like bronze twig-shaped door pulls maintain the home's theme unobtrusively. Cooney hired artist Kathy Robbins of Sweet Dreams to paint a rug on the bedroom wall, matching the real one on the floor; fragments of that pattern are also painted on either side of the headboard.

Back in the great room, the layout of the furniture compliments the setting. Three inlaid wood medallions highlight entrances, while dark wooden boards subtly delineate different areas without walls. Cooney had custom-made barn doors installed to continue the barn theme.

The color scheme is subdued, with accents in barn red, Williamsburg blue, antique white, and hunter green. Cooney also used those colors for the wooden cornices above the windows, then he embellished them with gold stars that closely resemble those found on hex signs.

Down in the basement, Cooney's engineering background comes to the fore as he explains the home's construction and systems. "My goal was to 'take the fight out of labor on site' by doing as much as possible at the factory," he says. "For example, the foundation, by Superior Walls of Ephrata, is pre-cast concrete. There is no pouring or molds. The walls were craned in and bolted into place in a mere twelve hours.

"To ensure structural soundness, we included a third-party engineer. The pilasters are engineered to provide added structural support under corners and posts. As you can see, there are two 53-foot laminated beams across the ceiling, supported by lolly posts and columns. We cannot eliminate shrinking and settling, but we can control it and, in fact, vertical shrinking is not a problem.

Cooney commends Kaiser Construction Co., Inc., of Douglassville, for their role in the construction. "They were with me every step of the way, as a partner in this process," he says. "I would definitely use them again."

The 17 hundred sq foot finished basement has a fireplace, stairs to the garage and an exit to ground level, and is plumbed for a bathroom. There is ample space for a home theater or and au pair suite. More unfinished space is over the garage; Cooney plans to use that for the ultimate home office and additional bedroom, complete with dramatic countryside view. (This portion was completed in 2002)

Looking back at the Cooney barn from outside, one sees how the different sections mesh. Two hay hoods, two cupolas, and a weather vane are perfect accompaniments for the tall silo. The colors of the slate-look, recycled plastic and rubber roofs on the garage and silo pick up the barn-red in the medal barn roof. All in all, a harmonious effect in an ideal location.

Industry figures show that log and timber frame houses represent five to ten percent of all custom houses built annually in the US. Dan Cooney expects that timber frame and log homes-like TimberDreams products-will appeal to a growing market segment of people who want truly custom-built homes, and who want to be intimately involved in the process to get just what they want in a living space.

According to Cooney, timber framing could cost twenty to twenty-five percent more than a conventional stick-built structure. For that price, one gets nature's own product fashioned into a tight, sound home with excellent structural integrity. In addition, the expense is somewhat recouped by savings in design costs, insulation, and maintenance. "This is for people who want a unique and extraordinary living space,"

Cooney says, “something other than just your typical drywall or conventional construction.”

Just get in line behind the tall guy with the black hat.